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ABSTRACT

The average elementary or secondary school physical education program has several elements or aspects which should be critically examined. School gym classes rely on routine and uninteresting activities which do not incorporate innovations in motor activities and movement experiences. However, programs designed to meet the needs of special students have gradually found their way into regular programs. These, instead of the regular programs, have become the pace setters for the profession. The average physical education teacher does not regularly attend conferences and conventions where new ideas are expounded, and the majority of physical educators do not belong to professional associations and do not subscribe to their newsletters and journals. Physical fitness and vigorous physical activities are not emphasized in the average physical education program, nor is the average physical education program based on instructional, educational, and developmental factors. There is also a lack of balance in curriculum selections offered to students. Recommendations are made for improvement, with emphasis on the college preparation of physical education teachers. (JD)

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"We have met the enemy and he is us!"
. . . . .Pogo

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As we move into the second quarter of the decade of the '80s, we find ourselves in the best of times and the worst of times!

Probably at no time in recorded history, certainly not in modern times, has the general public been so tuned in and turned onto physical exercise and vigorous activity. Runners, joggers, and walkers abound; racquet sports--tennis, racquetball, pickle ball, paddleball--have attained new heights; weight training regimens are being followed to gain muscular strength and endurance as well as for muscular toning and definition; acquatic activities--small craft, sailing, skin and scuba, water skiing, white water rafting as well as swimming and diving --have reached new participation heights; outdoor activities ranging from picnics and leisurely camping to the most vigorous and rigorous adventure and risk activities continue to gain in popularity. Wellness, quality of life, positive addiction through exercise, aerobics, fun and fitness are more than hollow words--they influence and affect life styles of hundreds of thousands--yea millions--of people around the world, not just within the confines of the United States. People know <u>how</u> active participation in an active life makes them feel, know <u>why</u> it is important for them to have such life styles, and know <u>what</u>

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to do to attain a good life. These same people are interested in and supportive of high quality physical activities and opportunities for their children as well as themselves.

When we examine closely, objectively, and unemotionally what is going on in school physical education programs, we see an entirely different picture! Students at virtually all school levels--elementary as well as secondary--are turned off by and tuned out to school centered physical education program activities. Rejection is despite the fact that school age students see adults, including their own parents, living physically active and invigorating lives. In addition, the younger generation is bombarded by advertisements for health spas, diet control, Nautilus centers, and racquet clubs, each giving a big pitch for these students to join up and get involved--and many do! Many young children are drawn into youth sports--Pop Warner football, Little League baseball, bitty basketball, kid hockey, youth soccer, ad infinitum--so they can have some fun (at least that's what they think and feel) and fulfill their natural urges for taking part in something physical.

While many parents are interested in and motivated by other reasons for encouraging--if not demanding--their children to participate in youth sports, many other parents see and feel the need for their children to have opportunities in some type of physical activities. Then this latter group of parents have the erroneous feeling that these children are receiving the type and quality of vigorous physical activity needed for optimum growth and development. The vicious no win spiral continues--school physical education programs fail to meet student needs, so they are attracted increasingly into community programs

until these reach points of little success, minimum satisfaction, and no fun! They then turn to other vistas, often involving little if any physical activity, and whether socially acceptable and even morally sound or not.

But wait a minute you say. What about the new physical education? How about the many outstanding projects such as Every Child A Winner, Project ACTIVE, Project I CAN, Project PEOPLE, Three M Project, Sunflower Project, to name but a few, that are considered exemplary physical and/or health education programs? What about the super programs presented at sessions during national, district, and state conferences and conventions? Don't we constantly read in journals, newsletters, and other professional periodicals about many exciting and innovative things going on in programs throughout the country?

That many outstanding motor activities, physical education programs, and movement experiences are available and being provided children at different school levels cannot be denied. Good things are happening; examples used in raising questions in the preceding paragraph are but a few projects and programs of what could be a much longer list. However, the crucial question that must be explored is the degree that high quality--even average--programs and activities are the exception rather than the rule. Specifically--

- Many respected and highly competent physical educators resent the term the new physical education because they see nothing new in any aspect of what is being advocated. Good physical educators have been taking these routes and emphasizing such concepts since there have been good physical educators! Many

physical educators who could hardly care less have never heard the term! Using gimmicks and introducing catchy terminology cannot change attitudes of individuals who do little or nothing and cannot hide poor programs as they perpetuate roll-out-the-ball programs, recreational activities, and play time. Despite supposed emphasis on the new physical education, Wes Suter, nationally known high school gymnast from South Lakes High School (Fairfax, Virginia) and featured in a new film on physical education and physical fitness stated unequivocally, "Physical education in school is not the same as it used to be...we don't get a chance to really work out anymore." Letters to editors in newspapers are even more negative--Mandatory School Gym Classes Should be Scrapped; This Student Not Sold on Physical Education Classes; School Gym Teachers Need a More Mature Attitude. One mother stated that her daughter would rather not graduate than take another year of physical education! One columnist stated, "...if it's a crime to hate high school gym, it certainly is a common one."

- Federal and state supported projects have had great impact on physical education programs in some sections of the country. It should be noted that many of these projects were developed and supported to meet needs of students with special needs--those with extremely low levels of physical fitness, poor motor ability, nutritional problems including both obesity and malnutrition, as well as individuals with traditional types of handicapping conditions usually associated with special

education. This in itself has been a professional indictment against physical education--our curricula have been so narrow and inflexible that they could not accommodate needs of students deviating from the so called norm. Instead, programs designed and developed to meet needs of special populations have provided the real innovation and creative changes that in recent years have found their ways into regular programs. Obviously it should have been the other way around--regular programs should have been pace setters and standard barers for the profession. Many individuals, despite extensive promotion and publicity, are totally unaware of the National Diffusion Network, National Inservice Network, and other sources from which project and resource information can be obtained. Sadly and ironically enough, individuals who could use such assistance and support the most are the ones who don't care!

- Sessions about outstanding, innovative, and exemplary programs presented at national, district, and state conventions can be deceiving and lull us personally and professionally into false senses of security and give erroneous perceptions about what is really going on in the majority of schools. Seldom, if ever, are situations and problems of types being addressed in this discussion introduced and dealt with in convention programs. Conferences and conventions must address and deal with problems, not just showcase that which is positive and good. We continually hear about need to save programs but never address how to deal with situations involving programs that by every professional

standard neither deserve to nor should be saved!

Professionally we can never be any stronger than our weakest program. Each of us must assume personal and professional responsibility and exert concerted efforts to make the weak strong, the poor good, the strong stronger, and the outstanding even better. Continued growth, development, and progress must be more than our watchword--it must motivate all that we individually and collectively do.

Individuals who routinely and regularly--or not routinely and even irregularly--attend conferences and conventions are ones who are professionally inclined, the ones who already provide positive experiences to students through appropriate developmental and instructional programs and real educational experiences--they are interested in making what is good better, making better best, and seeing that best becomes even better. This is akin situations in which ministers emphasize the importance of attending church in weekly sermons--those who need to hear it the most are not there!

- Situations regarding professional periodicals are similar to those involving conferences and conventions. Generally, only individuals who are professionally inclined and motivated are members of professional associations which publish and disseminate journals and newsletters. So, again, types of information found in professional journals and newsletters are not reaching those who need them the most. Simply look at membership numbers and patterns of the major American professional physical

education organization--American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. In the early 1970s total membership was slightly over 50,000; today total membership is barely 40,000. Of current membership approximately 26,000 are professional members, 5,500 undergraduate student members, and 8,500 libraries and other institutional memberships which receive one or more of the periodicals. The twenty-six thousand professional members, are fairly equally distributed among elementary school, secondary school, and college/university personnel. When one realizes that there are approximately 26,000 public school districts in the United States, the over whelming majority of physical educators who do not belong to AAHPERD--an average of less than two thirds of a school level member per school district--becomes obvious and extremely alarming. Large numbers of young college/university personnel are also forsaking Alliance membership for affiliations with other organizations and associations which provide services more directly related to individual interests and needs. The complexity of the current situation in being both the best and worst of times continues to reveal itself!

What is going on in too mary schools from coast to coast and being called physical education is appalling. Much of what is being seen and informally shared, reveals programs that provide little that is really physical and too little that is educational! Specifically--

- Physical fitness is virtually nonexistant in large numbers of physical education programs. Warm up exercises are included,

when they can be found, on strictly proforma bases. Aerobic activities can be called this simply because records and activities used are labeled as aerobics--few are vigorous enough, go long enough, and are intensive enough to attain any aerobic benefits; few cause heart rates to increase! Even schools which regularly do well in State Champions competition and have large numbers of students winning Presidential Physical Fitness awards rely on last minute crash programs to prepare students for the Youth Fitness Test used in these programs. Increasing numbers of schools are administering fitness tests only once per year and then simply because it is a state or local requirement. Too few physical educators are truly committed to fitness and vigorous physical activities. Recent reports of the AAU-Nabisco Physical Fitness Program on 7,600 students six to seventeen years of age sampled during 1979-80 and 1980-81 school years suggested that fitness levels seemed to peak at age fourteen and flatten out or decline after that age; only forty-three percent of the sample was able to achieve the average standard. These trends are ironic in view of interest shown in fitness by the general public, including many of these same students who join community agencies or commercial programs so they can attain and maintain necessary and desirable levels of fitness--and so they can feel better and attain higher quality lives.

- Administrators, parents, legislators, and others in the general community who are in positions to influence decisions and directions of and for physical education programs do not know

how to distinguish between good and bad programs! Many also equate physical education and interscholastic sport programs as synonomous. Too often if students appear to be active, create no discipline problems, and are apparently enjoying themselves, uninformed segments of the general community feel this is part and parcel of a good and sound program. On the other hand when an individual who knows and understands what can, should, and must go on in school centered physical education programs and activities views this same program, assessments will be entirely different. Soundness of physical education programs must be based on instructional, educational, and developmental factors. Distinguishing between physical education and interscholastic sport programs continues to be a never ending process. Somehow we must get parents of non-athletes and the general community as excited about instructional physical education as most are about interscholastic sports--it can be done but is up to us!

- Physical education class organizational patterns dominate which result in low-task participation times for students ranging from extremely poor to nil! For example, students often have on-task times from a few seconds to less than two minutes out of periods ranging from thirty to forty-five minutes. Students continually spend much more time awaiting their turns in lines than in taking part in wholesome and vigorous physical activities--and this is so unnecessary with all available about teaching methods and organizational approaches. It seems that

the faster we go the behinder we get.

- Senior high school programs--and increasing numbers of middle/intermediate/junior high schools--range from roll-out-the-ball (four Rs as recently described by Gerald Carlson--roll call, roll out the ball, rest, read the paper) to purely recreational activity and game play. In addition, activities with the same skills are repeated in the same ways for the same lengths of time year after year--basketball year after year for twelve years! The sad part is that when provided opportunities in instructional based and developmentally appropriate programs, student interest in and attitudes toward physical education change dramatically--from dislike and disinterest to active participation brought about by sincere interest, relevant challenge, and personal motivation.
- Middle/intermediate/junior high school programs are difficult to describe and categorize. Few of these schools have much if any articulation and continuity with feeder elementary schools and senior high schools they feed--programs at all levels tend to be independent and autonomous in and of themselves. Activities tend to be repeate from grade to grade so that real progression is difficult if not impossible to follow among most students. Schools at this level--middle/intermediate/junior high school--should serve as an intermediary and transition between self-contained elementary school classes to more departmentalized senior high school programs. In physical education these schools also need to

provide opportunities for students to explore a variety of activities in sufficient depth to learn, know, and understand their own interests and abilities in various team, dual, and individual games and sports. Only with this type of background can students know what they want and need to pursue through selective and elective opportunities in physical education at the senior high school level, and for participation in leisure hours now and in later years.

- Grading is really a joke; the same questions are being asked and dilemmas experienced as have been expressed for as far back as one can remember and survey the literature. Grades are predominately based on such factors as attending class regularly, dressing in some type of appropriate and clean garb, participating without creating problems, and in some cases showering on a regular basis. Too little emphasis and criteria can be found where grades are based on level of skill, motor proficiency, improvement in fitness and skill development, knowledge of rules and strategies, applications of courtesies appropriate to specific activities, and other objective measures related to goals and objectives of the program in general and specific units or modules in particular. Any relationship between program goals and student objectives, and assessment approaches and techniques used in grading appears to be purely coincidental and accidental! Reporting can and should at the very minimum be based on behavioral objectives developed for the class and ideally upon those determined as necessary and appropriate for each individual

student. In fact, degree to which each behavioral objective is attained becomes a logical basis for assessing progress and grading and an easy and understandable way to report to parents. This should be the report card of the future.

- Review of curriculum materials, resource units, lesson plans, and what is being attempted in classes and programs where efforts are made to instruct and teach reveals another major problem that when confronted head-on should be rather easy to rectify. Entirely too much is included and attempted in most physical education units and modules. As a result emphasis is upon seeing how much can be covered rather than in providing sufficient time to develop competence and skill--attain quantity at the expense of quality. For example, in a beginning tennis class developing an accurate forehand, adequate backhand, and consistent serve should be sufficient rather than also including volley, half volley, overhead smash, lob, and other advanced and complex skills. Developing the three basic strokes at an adequate and appropriate level of skill enables students to feel comfortable in playing the game with friends and members of the family as a recreational and leisure pursuit. This also provides an appropriate continuum from beginning to intermediate to advanced levels in physical education instructional classes. The mathematics equivalent to what we continually do in physical education is to teach addition and subtraction in every arithmetic and mathematics class throughout a student's entire school career, primary grades to college!

- Increasing numbers of schools provide selective opportunities for students during middle/intermediate/junior high school years as well as at the senior high school level. Careful investigation of what is going on reveals some options in activities in which students participate, but no rhyme or reason in the process. For example, students often take the same activity over and over during the same school year or on a year to year basis. Balance in activities which can be selected is virtually nil in too many places. It seems that interests of teachers, rather than needs and interests of students, provide major criteria in determining activities for these so called selective programs. Careful consideration must be given to types of activities included so that at the end of each student's physical education requirement, he/she has attained appropriate and necessary competencies and skills in so many team, individual, and dual activities. Such an approach is vital in insuring that those who complete our programs are physically educated upon completing these requirements.
- Despite efforts of some individuals, along with some state and local education agencies, to define a <u>physically educated person</u>, little can be found that shows consistency within the profession and agreement as to competencies and skills defining such individuals. Many individuals are obviously being active and becoming more physically educated in spite of us, not because of us! Again, note attitudes of many school age individuals toward school centered physical education--negative, why do we

have to take this, this is of no value! Yet many of these same individuals seek outlets in the community and through commercial outlets. The same can be said of adults who still feel they got little if anything from their school physical education experiences, yet have gotten into various types of regular programs and activities. An area relating and contributing to these deficiencies has been our failure--possibly unwillingness or inability--to deal with whys of physical activity along with the hows and whats--and to build programs based on individual student interests, needs, and abilities.

- Intramural programs at virtually all school levels are more on paper and in theory than in practice. When tournament play dominates what is supposed to be instructional physical education, student interests and needs for competitive outlets are being satisfied so there is no need to participate in after school intramural activities. An intramural program which includes only competitive activities is only half an intramural program. Some students do not want to commit time for competitive programs; they simply want to have opportunities to go in and work out, play, or socialize in a recreational setting. Such opportunities must be provided through intramural programs. School administrations must be committed to the worth and need of intramural programs so that facilities are reserved for these activities immediately after school and before interscholastic teams get facilities for practice sessions.

Many readers are going to take exception to these observations.

But, dear reader, you must remember that you are one of the parishioners in church! Ones in need of this message will not see the article and read these comments. Here is where each of us has personal and professional responsibilities to see that our associates not only receive this message, but that we do something to help them change their attitudes and ways. This has to be approached subtly and tactfully with some; with others a direct approach may be more effective and productive. Under any circumstance. and in any situation, this is going to require concerted effort and action; concerted time and energy are necessary.

However, unless something is done, and soon, it may be entirely too late! The current economic situation has resulted in school and educational programs being looked at critically to determine subjects and areas not contributing to the growth and development of students--interscholastic sport programs, as well as instructional physical education are not beyond the executioneers axe. Those that don't meet basic educational criteria are going to be in deep trouble in many if not most all communities. What is going on in too many schools makes it difficult, if not impossible, for strongest proponents of physical education and physical activities to defend such programs. To be credible we must be accountable for what we do and don't do in the schools.

If we look at ourselves historically we find clues and reasons for some of these problems. We need to look at our unique professional contributions to growth, development, and education of children, and then emphasize these through highest quality programs possible. No other disciplines or specializations in the schools deal with and

contribute to the physical and motor development of children--this is our thing, our reason for existence in the schools. Yet these are areas that have been continually deemphasized and reduced as other factors--rationalization, have been given to justify our positions and reasons for being. With these directions we have moved to shakier and shakier ground, found it more difficult to document progress and contributions, and moved into areas in which many other subjects, disciplines, and specializations contribute.

Certainly improving self-image, self-concept, and self-confidence must permeate everything we do. But these can and must be outcomes attained through fulfilling and satisfying the physical and motor goals and objectives for which physical educators are prepared and uniquely able to offer students--no others can provide these vital experiences to children. It seems that there is need to review and revive some of the basic philosophies and important teachings of the late great Charles McCloy--many from other disciplines are doing this whether it be knowing or unknowing.

Many readers are going to place blame for situations that have been discussed squarely upon the shoulders of professional preparation programs--what is going on in colleges and universities? While there are deficiencies and many needs in professional preparation programs, it appears to me that students entering the field are adequately or better prepared for the realities of the school world. As I see it the problem is centered at the school level. I am further convinced that many, if not most, teachers in the field who are doing so little, or doing what they are doing so badly, were enthusiastic, committed,

and dedicated to high quality instructional programs when they left the college/university classroom for the school gymnasium and playfield. However, something has happened to them over the years. Most have been engulfed by a system that places little value on high quality instructional and educational physical education programs. They have regressed and been absorbed in an atmosphere that emphasizes winning records of interscholastic teams. In addition many more who are teaching at the elementary school level, and even middle/intermediate/junior high school level are coaching at the senior high school level. More women at all levels are also coaching. Many of these individuals rationalize that the two--teaching physical education and coaching--cannot coexist at the same levels so they take paths of least resistance.

As graduating seniors enter the field they must be prepared to withstand pressures to conform and join the roll-out-the-ball gang. Their enthusiasm commitment, and dedication must be so deeply engrained, part of their very lives, that they will be able not only to withstand the pressure but be willing and able change agents, working slowly but surely to change the system. Unless the system is changed--and it can be changed by mobilizing parents and families of students not involved in interscholastic programs in terms of benefits and values instructional and developmental physical education programs provide their children as well as all professional--physical education as an integral part of school programs could be doomed.

Some thought needs to be given radical changes in certification requirements. Today individuals possessing majors or minors in physical education are certified and considered qualified to coach. As a result

many individuals who are not interested in teaching physical education get degrees, certification, and jobs in physical education as their entre into coaching. If coaching required special certification so that certification in physical education did not automatically qualify an individual to coach, we should be helped in attacking and alleviating many of these problems. Requiring specialized coaching certification would not only provide better trained and qualified coaches but deter individuals interested only in coaching from pursuing and obtaining degrees in physical education--they would still have to obtain coaching certification. Conversely individuals interested only in teaching physical education and not coaching could place greater concentration on this area and not be burdened with coaching courses and requirements. Of course individuals interested in physical education and coaching could be certified in both areas. Then those teaching physical education and coaching would more likely have genuine interests in both areas.

While we are at it let's also define the truly physically educated physical educator. It is folly to attempt to make all physical education majors become equally competent in all activities. Just as we should want our students to be competent in a specific number of individual, dual, and team activities, competencies and skills in a similar pattern of activities are necessary for physical education major students. Diversity in and balance of activities offered in any school then becomes a product of staffing in which abilities of all teachers compliment and supplement one another.

The physical education profession has been both proactive and reactive. Many educational approaches and techniques were pioneered

in physical education and coaching--team teaching, learning centers, audiovisual aids, loop films, ability grouping, differential staffing, to name but a few. On the other hand we have been conservative, bound by tradition, and slow to make many necessary changes. Models are there; resources are available. Time is growing short. Action--concerted and definitive action--is needed now.

Unless the enemy so aptly identified by that great American philosopher Pogo in the title of this article is met head on, we will surely, but surely, find ourselves in the situation described by Benjamin Franklin--"We must all hang together or most assuredly will hang separately!"